



1977-1997: A Retrospective of the Work of the Historic Preservation Training Center

On November 5, 1997, the Historic Preservation Training Center (HPTC) will celebrate its 20th Anniversary as an organization. For these 20 years, the mission of the HPTC has been to support the preservation and maintenance work of the National Park Service by providing a comprehensive program of preservation trades skills training. Established in 1977 to meet the growing national demand for specialists within the NPS who possessed the skills to perform the work necessary to maintain and preserve thousands of historic resources within the national park system, the Center continues to fulfill the original mission.

Previously called the Williamsport Preservation Training Center, a new name was adopted in 1996 when the Center moved from Williamsport, MD, to Frederick, MD. The Center has a permanent staff of 40 employees. The headquarters and training facilities are found within Monacacy National Battlefield at the historic Gambrill House. In 1996, the Center initiated an innovative partnership with the City of Frederick that secured the use of the abandoned historic Jenkins Cannery Complex in downtown Frederick for use as a shop, training facility, depot, and operations base. Rehabilitation of the Cannery Complex is now underway.

The HPTC uses historic preservation projects as the "hands-on" vehicle for program participants to acquire

building craft skills, receive instruction in preservation philosophy, and gain experience in historic building technology and project management. Over 481 preservation projects, with a combined construction value of more than \$27,300,000, have been completed by the HPTC since 1977. These completed projects include preservation treatment work on dozens of National Historic Landmark buildings throughout the United States.

Teamwork is emphasized on HPTC projects and flexibility is encouraged. The positive impact of the 56 men and women who have com-

pleted the HPTC training programs has extended beyond the NPS to other preservation organizations. Hundreds of other preservation maintenance workers, both within and outside the NPS, have attended or participated in HPTC training projects or workshops over the past 20 years at many famous historic sites. HPTC programs have produced empowered preservation trade workers.

All the operations of the Center are entirely funded by the project revenue raised from funds produced by the preservation construction work completed by the program participants and staff. The HPTC has been recognized for accomplishment in quality historic preservation trade training and project craftsmanship. In 1995, the Maryland Historical Trust awarded the Center a Preservation Service Award for "its significant contribution to historic resources in Maryland's National Park System through its unique preservation craft training program, preservation construction services, technical advice, and its educational outreach...." We intend to continue these contributions for the next 20 years.

H. Thomas McGrath, Jr.
Superintendent



This is the most recent HPTC photo. As always not everyone could be there. From top to bottom, left to right: Dale Lupton, Bob Williams, Michael Seibert, Marty Vittore, Karen 'Petey' Bender, Roddy Rohrer; Bill 'Chappy' Chapman, Bill Hose, Doug Hicks, Gary Allen Dinehart, Fritz Rushlow, Dorothy Printup, Archie Kendle, Sharon Roof, Norma Dale, Sue McGregor, Eric Ford, Chris McGuigan, Tinuadra Foster, Bernie George, Ralph Doell, Billy Hendrick, Laurie Hempton, Donnie Runion; Paul Neidinger, Lynne Goddard, Reed Robinson, Bill Thompson, Connie Hetzel, Tom Vitanza, Tom McGrath, Jamie Wilburn, John Hoover, Dean Wigfield; Not pictured: Robert Boydston, Jeff Chipley, Dominic DeRubeis, Amy Hite, Ross Hunt, Scott Jones, Les Messer, Ken Sandri. Photo by Beverly Rinaldi-Alt.

Learning from Each Other

A Conversation with Jim Askins, first Chief of the Williamsport Preservation Training Center

Where did the original idea of an NPS historic preservation craft training center come from?

You have to go back a long way to the early 1960s. After I had been in the Park Service for a little while, I left Harpers Ferry, worked at Pea Ridge, Vicksburg, and then moved back to Harpers Ferry. When I came back, I had developed an understanding of how the NPS conducted its business. At that particular time almost all historic preservation projects were done out of the lump-sum program. They were relatively small in scope and small in funding. There wasn't a great deal of design or planning done in concert with small projects. These projects were being attempted by people who did not understand historic preservation, were doing irreparable damage to the cultural resources, and it was happening year after year after year.

There was very little control over this lump-sum program. I became cognizant of the fact that the NPS lacked the resources to adequately deal with the sophistication of historic preservation type projects. I raised this question numerous times in the mid- to late- 1960s. When the 1966 Historic Preservation Act took effect we were bound to do certain impact statements before we touched the resources. There wasn't anyone in the Park Service with that kind of experience. If I remember, and we're talking ancient history, there were only three or four of us who had hands-on historic preservation craft capability in the NPS—Bob Vorhees, Gordie Wittington, Harry Martin, and myself. All of a sudden under this lump-sum program, each of the regions programmed 15 or 20 small projects. There weren't enough people to do them. I decided that we needed more trained people able to work on these small cultural resource projects that could be completed without specific planning, design, or supervision. In 1967, I started

training people at Harpers Ferry. The idea of Williamsport started here. I had 45 people working for me when Nixon got elected. I went hunting for two weeks; and when I came back, they had terminated all of my people. They were all temporary people. Some of those people had been in the NPS and exposed to historic preservation for 8-10 years. There was a tremendous amount of talent and skill in that group of people that was just arbitrarily terminated.

We then tried to do this work by contract which was an absolute disaster because the planning and design necessary to control the specifics of historic preservation ate up all the money and

nothing was ever accomplished in terms of bricks and mortar. This is when I began preaching that we needed to develop people. I started again in 1968 to draw people together to a central location to do millwork and special things at Harpers Ferry

and started training people like Bob Flickinger, Sam May, and Sherman Grove. When we started the C&O Canal restoration team I already had a cadre of people together. We used the C&O Canal program as a background to train and hold them together because it was large enough and had enough funding. I kept trying to sell the idea that we needed to produce these people because they weren't available anywhere.

By the mid 1970s I had developed enough visibility and had the ear of enough people that they started to take me seriously. In 1976, at the Regional Directors Meeting in Santa Fe they had a meeting of everyone who was interested in historic preservation to determine what the needs of the Service were. The Regional Directors decided what they needed most was a cadre of qualified historic preservation craftspeople. They put together three panels to search the construction industry, the Service, and academia to see where these people



Jim Askins with his dog, Tess, at home in Pennsylvania. Photo by Doug Hicks.

might be. They found out that these people did not exist in the NPS, academia did not deal with historic preservation crafts, and the construction industry thought historic preservation was a joke. The Regional Directors, then through the Director of the Denver Service Center (DSC), asked Don Bressler to come to Williamsport to find out what I needed to start a training program to meet the NPS needs and that's how Williamsport got started.

What was the original mission or vision for the training program?

Just as it was in 1989 when I retired, to develop a cadre of people who would be able to take care of the cultural resources under the jurisdiction of the NPS. I told them in 1977 that we could not meet that goal in 30 years because we were starting with so few people to develop that critical mass.

Why did NPS management approve the program?

Criticism. The sophistication of the public who realized that the NPS was doing a terrible job of taking care of the cultural resources of this country. That's what caused Williamsport to happen more than anything else.

Did you envision a union-type apprenticeship program or a college curriculum?

In order for someone to work independently in the federal sector and not screw up a resource they had to have a tremendous array of skills. You had to have craft skills, administrative skills, people skills, and you had to have academic skills—it was the marriage of these things that I had in mind. It was why I selected a cross section of people as trainees knowing that I would not have the fiscal resources to hire instructors. The participants would help expose the other participants to their strong suits. I mixed craftspeople with professional people with people who had administrative skills and people skills. The concept was that they would learn from each other. That's what the philosophy of Williamsport was.

The first group was John Marsh, an architect, Jerry Shaffer, a mason, Bob Hartman, a mason, and Michael Lee, a carpenter. Fran Lucas came just a little later as a woodcrafter. Tom Crellin, Sam May, and Ken Bennet were part of my staff on the C&O Canal and I used those people as mentors. I took contract and day-labor work on the C&O and used it as a vehicle to train these people. I had a lot of planning and design projects so trainees got involved in collecting information, doing evaluations, and assisting with planning and design.

You directed the program between 1977 and your retirement in 1989. During that time the WPTC grew from 8 employees to 35, was administratively transferred, and completed

in excess of 200 projects. **What stands out as your greatest accomplishment?**

When Don Bressler came to Williamsport and asked me to start a training center, he asked me what I would need. I said I would not touch Williamsport without having 25 permanent full-time positions. I was not going to go through all the temporary stuff like Harpers Ferry again and lose all the people after they had been trained. I said I would absolutely not do it with temporary employees. Bressler went back to DSC and made his report and they gave me 25 permanent full-time positions to start Williamsport. I also insisted on free reign to work in all 10 regions. The team concept that existed in Denver just wasn't going to work for a training center. I got the authorization to work anywhere in the NPS that I wanted, but the funding was my responsibility. I wanted the program to be project funded because I wouldn't consider being placed anywhere in the Service except the Denver Service Center. My Service Center job had a national scope and I didn't want to give that up and have a training program that was locked into a specific area. When we moved from DSC to Harpers Ferry Center in 1987, the program got an additional 10 positions, one from each region, to bring the total to 35.

My greatest contribution was to show that what we were doing was destroying cultural resources under the guise of maintaining them. We made people understand that they needed to do business a different way. If I contributed anything to the NPS, it was that idea. That idea may not have been original to me, but through my visibility and the amount of noise and people I beat over the head, I raised the awareness level of the special needs of cultural resources.

How would you define craftsmanship?

Craftsmanship is a well planned and managed execution of a specific design. Most people in the trades today are builders, not craftsmen. They assemble pre-manufactured components but do not construct. A friend of my generation and I were talking this past spring, if you walked into a lumber yard today the materials you are confronted with are so alien to my generation you can't even find what we used 40 years ago. Sizes have changed, materials are prepackaged or premixed, the building technology has changed. You can't equate the materials we used during our apprenticeships with the materials in a lumber yard today. If I had to go out and build a house today of the materials that are available, I would be better off being a shoemaker. ▢

This interview was conducted by Doug Hicks, Deputy Superintendent, HPTC, in September 1997, with the idea of documenting the Center's beginnings.

Preservation in



Left, Exhibits Specialist Dave Thomas instructs an NPS Facility Manager at an Advanced Woodworking Skills Seminar at the HPTC shop.

Right, HPTC Intern Fritz Rushlow demonstrates lead paint removal techniques at Trophy Park Gazebo, Norfolk Naval Shipyard.



Exhibits Specialist Marty Vittore (r) and Carpenter Archie Kendle (l) in the field repairing historic log cabin frame at Jefferson National Forest.



Left, Historical Architect Eric Ford concentrates on a design plan in the garret studio in Gambrill House, HPTC headquarters.

Right, Exhibits Specialist Chris Robinson sizes and shapes a new post for the reconstruction of lock gates at Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area.



Constant Practice



Left, HPTC staff Masonry Leader Dominic DeRubis (l) teaches the basics of preservation masonry in specialized workshops held at park locations.



Right, Staff Exhibits Specialist Dean Wigfield (l) instructs a Job Corp Co-Op as part of the Trophy Park Gazebo preservation project.

The Grey Towers mansion NHL receives the finishing touches on its new slate roof from HPTC Supervisory Exhibits Specialist Bill Hose.



Left, Preservation Skills Workshop for New York State Parks provided hands-on opportunities for the participants to make repairs.

Right, Cleaning bricks is part of the project for Preservation Maintenance Worker Sue McGregor at the Dairy House, Hampton Mansion NHS.



THAT WILLIAMSPORT EXPERIENCE

Williamsport was the name of a place in Pennsylvania I recalled passing along I-80 years ago, before that town in Maryland came to be associated with a very focused and important one year in my professional life from 1980 to 1981. In the summer of 1980, I had taken a special assignment with HABS/HAER in Virginia City, Nevada, on detail from Technical Preservation Services in the Washington Office. With regionalization of the programs to which I was attached, I was looking at a major career choice as to which regional office to apply if I wanted to stay with the career path I had been on. During that rather frantic time, I found out about an architect-trainee position at the Williamsport Preservation Training Center, and this job struck me as presenting an opportunity for exploring an entirely different path in architecture and historic preservation.

My one year architect-trainee detail, which was a fast-track experiment compared to the multi-year assignments of other architects before and after me, had a very focused end goal—to complete a historic structure report on the Piper Barn at Antietam National Battlefield. Intertwined with my days at the Piper Barn or in the library at Antietam, I was to pursue an intense schedule of training courses and details at offices in Washington, Charlestown Navy Yard, and others, plus actual hands-on “real work” with my fellow preservation crafts trainees at different construction sites such as the wood shingle re-roofing of the bank barn at Hopewell Village National Historic Site, Elverson, Pennsylvania. I was also assigned the job of fabricating a window or door in the woodshop at Williamsport to fill in the idle time I may encounter.

During that year at Williamsport, I was given opportunities to learn about and gain experiences in aspects of architecture and historic preservation that have become important professional

tools in my personal “kit.” Williamsport provided the introduction to the hands-on physical reality of historic preservation. I view the Williamsport Preservation Training Center Certificate as an important milestone in post-graduate education on the road to becoming an architect and a historic preservationist. I recall the times spent with Jim Askins as being major learning experiences. At



Arlington House, I recall lying on the floor with Jim looking up at the ceiling plaster to discern tell-tale patterns in the shadows, colors, and materials. The other senior staff I met and learned from in my string of duty assignments each presented very unique and important episodes in my training program.

Williamsport presented me with the growth opportunities in developing my eye and abilities in preservation tools such as visual analysis, historic material analysis, measured drawing and photographic documentation, archival research, interpretation of other disciplines input such as archeologists and historians, production of a professional document that would pass muster for major construction funding, management training in supervising a team, and the hands-on teamwork of a construction project working with the people skilled in the different crafts, trades, and materials such as carpentry, masonry, metalworking, and painting. Since leaving Williamsport in 1981, and eventually leaving the National Park Service in 1985, I have come to understand that my year there provided the experiences that created the professional knowledge and abilities that I use in my practice as an architect and historic preservationist.

—George Siekkinen

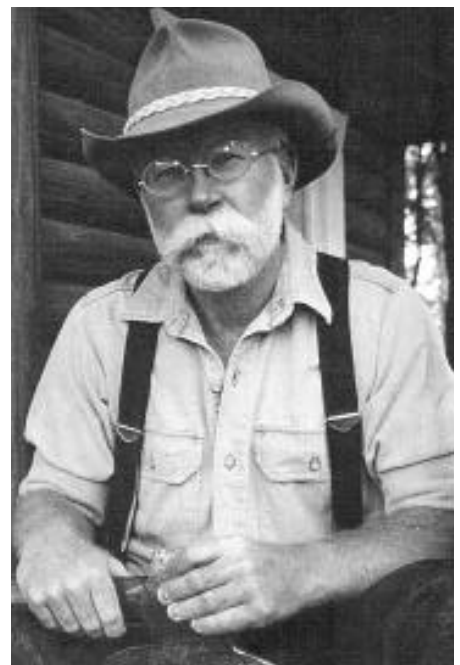
Senior Architect, Technical Services
National Trust for Historic
Preservation

PUTTING MORE TOOLS IN MY TOOLBOX

My involvement in the National Park Service and the Williamsport Preservation Training Center may be a little different from most.

I came to the NPS and federal employment at 40 years of age and in the middle of my preservation career. I was accepted into the WPTC program in 1986. I moved from Boulder, Colorado, not knowing wholly what to expect. It was not easy. What was particularly upsetting was the fact that the WPTC did not give me the opportunity to work on log projects, which were my specialty. I was given the reason, but I did not readily accept or understand their rationale, until I got further into the program. They wanted me to put “more tools in my toolbox” and that would not have been accomplished working on log buildings.

My supervisor, Bill Hose, wisely suggested that I investigate areas in preservation completely different from my background. I decided to pursue working on masonry and wood structures in a coastal environment and dealing with the challenges of salt, sand, and wind. Before I joined the NPS, I had visited Cape Hatteras National Seashore's Ocracoke Island in the Outer Banks of North Carolina and the lighthouse. At the time, I thought how wonderful it would



Photos on preceding two pages courtesy HPTC staff including: Laurie Hempton, Tom McGrath, Chris McGuigan, Paul Neidinger, Dorothy Printup, Ken Sandri, Bill Thompson, and Marty Vittore.

be to work on that lighthouse. It was not long before a project came up on Ocracoke Island, working on the lighthouse keepers' quarters, and I got the project!

I worked on other projects around the country during the next two years, but the work at Cape Hatteras National Seashore was a special experience. I got along well with the superintendent and I was asked back on several projects. During my third year at the WPTC, I accepted a one-year detail which eventually led to a permanent position with the park.

At present, I am working with Jill Osborn, the Forest Service national training coordinator, and Joe Gallagher, who is in historic preservation with the Forest Service out of Utah. Together we are developing a national training program for the Forest Service. It's a very exciting detail, with some important implications for raising the skill level of agency staff in historic preservation.

I have concluded that at this stage in my career, training people in the techniques of historic preservation is where I can make the most valuable contribution. This is where I think I can have the most impact and impart some of the knowledge I have gained over the years, including those important years at the WPTC.

The NPS Historic Preservation Training Center has been critical to my success in the federal government. I acquired some valuable training, particularly in craft skills. Primarily what I learned was how to get a project completed efficiently and professionally within the federal animal. I learned how to pull all the elements together and make a project work. That has benefited me every working day of my career.

—Bernie Weisgerber

*Historic Preservation Specialist,
USDA Forest Service, Region One*

WHAT A RIDE!

In December of 1994, I arrived in Williamsport, Maryland, to begin my three years of training in the field of preservation as an exhibit specialist intern. With the three years now nearly completed, I can look back and say "what a ride!" The method of training I had pictured in my mind when we loaded up the van in Yellowstone and



headed east was soon to be forgotten. The idea of sitting behind a desk and being instructed changed to being assigned a laptop and heading into the field as a project leader. This new role, complete with procurement, contracting, managing a field crew, tracking a ledger, documenting, and producing a report every time you turned around, all seemed more than a bit overwhelming. More than once I asked myself why I had left that quiet spot in the Rockies. But as time passed, and I began to feel more comfortable with my new role, I started to appreciate the knowledge and information that I was absorbing. The staff at the HPTC is always there to offer their assistance, and the craftsmen that are in the field are quick to share their skills.

The Historic Preservation Training Center allows each intern the opportunity to chart his own course through his Individual Development Plan. The plan may increase your expertise in a specific craft and/or grant you the knowledge needed to manage a complex project from start to finish.

I have to say that the past three years, working and learning at the HPTC, has been the best possible opportunity for my future goals with the National Park Service. I would strongly encourage anyone with a desire for preservation and maintenance and a pride for the National Park Service to apply to the HPTC, and hold on for the "ride of your life!"

—Bill Thompson

*3rd year Exhibits Specialist
(Restoration)*

GIVE 'TIL IT HURTS

My initial attraction to the Historic Preservation Training Center was the work ethic displayed by its crew members. The HPTC is unlike any related government or private operation. The center is an infusion of knowledge, teamwork, and leadership. A trainee first notices an organized structure that requires and stresses production.

Another facet is the remarkable abundance of formal training—a dichotomy. Because I will leave the HPTC with a particular title, I had better have the experience and knowledge to be a specialist. My Individual Development Plan is critical to the path I have chosen to reach a particular professional goal. I am aggressive in my request for training, and the HPTC has responded favorably. The National Park Service, and the tax-



payers, send me all over the country in pursuit of knowledge and experience. There is an unspoken understanding—an implied contract—and personal conviction that results in such an investment. For example, while on Cumberland Island National Seashore re-roofing a cedar shingle building, I awoke every day with my heart soaring, chills on my skin, and butterflies in my stomach. I was ready to work. I have a reason. This country, the NPS, and the HPTC have given me the opportunity to give back—give more than I take—give 'til it hurts.

I am also using the HPTC as a vehicle for promotion. Initially, my Lakota heritage drew me to natural resource oriented parks. I now have a profound and educated respect for historic structures, their personal history, structural and decorative elements, and the disciplines used in constructing them.

The HPTC has a bold mission, a strong reputation, a three-year overlapping revolving door that has worked for 20 years. I give credit to the core staff who are masters and teachers of the trades and the administration that allows it to happen. As a Preservation Specialist, it will be my duty to perpetuate or enhance the gifts derived from the HPTC. I paint a pretty picture—but it is my picture.

—Reed Robinson
2nd year Preservation Trainee

IT WAS WORTH THE WAIT

I joined the National Park Service in the spring of 1990 at Cape Hatteras National Seashore as a temporary employee. While there, I was introduced to historic preservation. I later learned that a position was open at the Historic Preservation Training Center (Williamsport). Although it was not to be at that time, seven years later I was selected for a Preservation Trainee position. Coming to the training center, I had



some preconceived notions, and so far it has greatly surpassed all of my expectations. I have already received several hours of class and shop training and an almost overwhelming amount of information on preservation philosophy. These aspects have truly excited me, although there is another aspect of the training center that has awed me. The staff and other trainees are the most efficient, knowledgeable, and personable Park Service employees I have met so far in my career. Their ability to share the knowledge of the delicate aspects of

preservation has enhanced my craft skills.

Thus far, I have participated in plaster stabilization, lead abatement, and other preservation techniques training courses. The project that I have worked on since my arrival here has given me a chance to increase my skills in weak areas such as masonry. I am just awed by the thought of how much more knowledge, skills, and abilities I will obtain by the end of three years of training.

—William Chapman
1st year Preservation Trainee

HPTC'U'— CHANGING COURSES

I first became interested in working for the Williamsport Preservation Training Center when my father, who is a seasonal ranger with the C&O Canal NHP, gave me a brochure that described the center and its functions. This encounter soon led to a change in my course of study at the University of Maryland from architectural design to an individual study of architectural history. This change in study was geared to prepare me for a career in the preservation field, more specifically with the Williamsport Preservation Training Center.

After a series of related positions in the preservation field including a summer tour with the Historic American Buildings Survey, I was hired by WPTC under contract as a research architectural historian to complete a historic structure report for Harpers Ferry NHP. My six-month contract soon turned into almost three years. During this time I worked on a variety of projects ranging from editing and writing reports to painting the interior of the Gambrill House. The most interesting of these projects was the *Historic Lighthouse Preservation Handbook*. This project lasted nearly two years and entailed visiting over 35 lighthouses. The product of this project is a comprehensive preservation guideline for government and civilian lighthouse managers.

In March 1997, I was hired as an exhibits specialist intern. Since I started my duties as an intern, I have had the opportunity to work on a variety of pro-



jects. My first project was located in Appomattox Courthouse, Virginia, where I worked under exhibits specialist Lynne Goddard, gaining experience and familiarity with the staff and the daily procedures of day labor projects. I have since started my own project at Allegheny Portage Railroad NHS. The scope of this project includes the cutting and shaping of stones for a culvert retaining wall using traditional methods.

My feelings about the program are strong. I view my three years at the Center as preservation graduate school. I plan to draw heavily on the institutional knowledge of the day labor staff and section leaders to help me perform as effectively as possible when executing treatments on historic structures. I believe there is no other place in the country where someone can have the opportunity to perform preservation treatments on the variety of structures and under the variety of conditions as they can while working at the HPTC. In addition to project-related experiences, the Center provides the funding and opportunity to attend training programs that further develop preservation skills. This aspect of the Center has provided me with a "curriculum" that will further groom me as a preservation professional in the National Park Service. I feel when I complete my time at the Center I will be well versed in the field of historic preservation and a valuable asset to the National Park Service.

—Mike Seibert
1st year Exhibits Specialist
(Restoration)